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 Syria, Factor 19: Foreign Aid

Syria: Securing Human Needs

“Syria is the country that is in the middle of the worst humanitarian crisis of our time” (“What”). The country of Syria is in the middle of a civil war along with multiple terrorist groups invading the country. The United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that over ten million citizens have been affected by the Syrian Crisis, and six million are jobless and homeless. Citizens who have not fled as refugees to other countries are displaced all over the country. Urban and rural families alike are watching their home country degrade more every day; without the help of the world around them, Syrians will continue to struggle for basic human needs.

Prior to the Syrian Civil War, the country was stable. Families both in rural and urban areas had access to healthcare, went to school, and had food available to them. The average family in Syria has about six people. Public schools were available to students; they attended six years of primary school, three years of intermediate, and three years of high school (“Education”). Women in Syria have a lower literacy rate and are typically not pushed as much as men to go to school. The Syrian government also provided free health care to all citizens. Many people who are more privileged hire outside of the government due to its facilities being unsanitary and lacking modern equipment (“Health”). Typically, ones who hire outside of the government are urban families over rural families. Rural families that produce agriculture accounted for “40% of the labor force and 27% of gross domestic product” (“Syria” *Encyclopedia*). Rural families usually farm, and they are given specific boundaries to follow. Farmers are only allowed 37-124 acres to farm (“Economy”). The Kogod School of Business states that the urban workforce contributes approximately 50% of the workforce in Syria. The minimum wage in Syria at the beginning of their crisis was 9,975 Syrian pounds per year, equivalent to one American dollar per hour (“Poor”). Prior to the Syrian crisis, the citizens had selections at grocery stores for what food they brought home to their families (Starr). All of these circumstances were ideal until the country started to collapse.

The strenuous conflict in Syria is one that has been going on for years. Since 2011, Syria has been caught amidst a harsh civil war. Since the start, the rural and urban populations of the country have been booted from their homes, towns, and cities. Twelve million Syrians have fled from their homes, four million have fled to other countries, and the rest are caught amidst the battle zone (World). Infrastructure, healthcare, and education are now destroyed, right along with the economy (Starr). And while the conflict in Syria has been going on for years, it continues to worsen every day. The United States Fund (UICEF) reports that Syrian children are part of the largest, most rapid education decline ever in history (World). Food has become scarce, and food prices have skyrocketed: “food prices have risen, ...up to 300% in some cases, these prices have affected farmers and consumers alike” (“Poor”). Locals who have lived in Syria their whole lives state that the rising food cost is the hardest situation to deal with besides the war (“Overview”). “The United Nation World Food Program Estimates that four million Syrian are unable to secure their nutritional needs” (“Poor”). This can be due to terrorist groups that are taking Syrians’ water supply or to Mother Nature who has left the country in a horrific drought. A study shows that “cumulative rainfall from September 2013 to mid-February 2014 was recorded at less than half of the long-term average” (Lund). And in more recent years the rainfall has dropped 66% (Lund). Due to the drought and terrorist groups taking over the water supply, farmers are not getting water for irrigation as they did in the past, leading fields to be abandoned and farmers unable to produce food like they used to. So now people, not just farmers, are trying to grow food in the toughest places between corroded buildings (Starr). “There is a 40% decline from 4.5 million tons of production in 2012 to 2.4 million tons of food this year” (“Overview”). Citizens are now preserving as much food as they can and rely on canned and dried foods

more than ever. With a minimum amount of food available, people are starving and left in terrible states of health. The United Nations Refugee agency estimates that there are 6.5 million people left in Syria (“Syrian”). Of the remaining 6.5 million, very few have access to health care, leading to shortages of medicine that have created a catastrophic health situation (“Overview”). Children in particular are becoming ill and malnourished. They are becoming extremely susceptible to diseases due to the lack of sanitation; of these diseases diarrhea and cholera are hitting children the worst (“Overview”). Adults and children have seen a heavy increase in the number of cases of polio, measles, and meningitis (“Health”). Besides diseases, injuries are affecting them, too. Around 25,000 injuries have included traumas to the head, thorax, and abdominal regions when citizens have been present in war zones (Kherallah). Economically, there is close to no workforce anymore. Syrians without jobs have no money to provide themselves with their basic needs. The government is also nearly completely cutting its funding on heating oil and water (“Economy”). Citizens now only have eight hours of water and energy use out of their 24-hour day. “The water supply is down to 30 liters per person which is one-tenth of what the average American uses” (“What”).

In a country that is so corrupt and worsening every day, the only hope it has is for the world to step up and save it through foreign aid. Through countries providing foreign aid to those left in Syria, citizens would have access to food and healthcare that they vitally need. With donations from the world, Syrian children can get back into school, more people can be healthy, and citizens could have a slice of normalcy. Using different forms of aid, Syria can become more stable. Educationally, children can start attending classes that are often provided by any foreign agency. Bringing in medical training aid can provide advice and medicines that could improve the way people left in Syria are living (“Advantages”). Health wise, average families in Syria would benefit greatly from foreign aid. Studies show that countries that have health aid had a rapid rise in their people’s life expectancies (Bendavid). Aid focusing on agriculture can benefit Syrians by rebuilding rural areas of Syria (“Advantages”). Agricultural investment is the most effective strategy for poverty reduction in rural areas, which happens to be where most Syrians are located (World). When foreign aid is invested into agriculture, the country is able to combat poverty and help secure food. If farmers are able to farm again, food will be more available and less expensive in markets (Lui). Aid can increase food production and the quality of food available to families in Syria through groups that can bring in new knowledge and ways to farm to farmers.

If Syria is able to become stable from foreign aid, then future generations will be living in a more structured country. Children should be able to return to school if the proper schools are set up by organizations. School attendance could return to normal for Syrian children. By other countries providing foreign aid agriculturally, rural farmers would get the tools they need to carry on with their agricultural practices. Farmers could be able to contribute 40% to the Syrian workforce that would lead to a stronger economy. By getting the proper tools and equipment, they could be back to growing wheat, barely, fruits, vegetables, beets, poultry, and milk (Starr), all foods that can stimulate Syria’s gross domestic product in years ahead. Experts on agriculture could also be brought over to introduce new ways to increase the amount of food or increase the quality of food that was produced in the past.

Using foreign aid to rebuild Syria will take more than volunteers and small donations to aid organizations. With research and understanding it is now clear that in order for Syrians to have access to food and water, military enforcement and financial investment from outside countries are needed to reach this step in food and water security to Syrians. The United Nations states that in order to secure Syrians’ most urgent needs, it would take 8.4 billion dollars, but so far only half of that has been raised (“What”). It is clear that countries are hesitant to throw that kind of money around, but like Eli Sugeran from the *San Diego Times* states, “Foreign assistance promotes a safer world and saves other countries billions of dollars annually by preventing future conflicts.” Countries need to keep the mindset that they are helping to save the lives of Syrians who happen to be caught in the middle of a horrific crisis, and they are helping to make a country great again, which in a long run will benefit their own countries. And while many think countries such as the United States need to focus on their own problems before being involved in other

countries, it needs to be reminded that the US is not amidst a war zone where millions of citizens have been dying. The US is significantly better off than Syria and has access to the simple aspects of life such as clean water. Strong countries such as the United States need to use their militaries to take back dams that terrorist groups such as ISIS have taken over. If military enforcement is scaled up and used properly, Syrian dams that farmers rely on for irrigation and that urban and rural citizens rely on for drinking water and sanitation can be restored, and Syria is back to being able to support itself in one major way. Farmers with irrigated land equal farmers that are once again producing vital crops to feed their country, which increases the amount of food available to rural and urban families. In order to use the military in Syria to regain access to dams, the military must instill great fear into terrorist groups such as ISIS. The more forces that are in Syria, the more serious ISIS and smaller terrorists groups take the military relief efforts. If the number of military forces is large, terrorist organizations will feel threatened by the presence of a military force on their homeland. If ISIS feels threatened, it ideally will be more willing to make negotiations that can help Syrians regain their dams. Besides countries using their militaries, it would be beneficial to invest their money into organizations that have already been set up for this particular situation.

Major world organizations are in place to help the Syrian people. Rural and urban families should be open to organizations coming into their country so that they are able to receive needs. One aid organization in particular is called Hand in Hand for Syria; this organization is one of the few that is set up strictly for the people who are in Syria and have not fled as refugees. Hand in Hand for Syria is able to provide food, water, and medical attention to families through the generous donations of people (Goyette). It is able to provide medical and humanitarian aid to 90 percent of people in the country (“About”). With starvation being very real in Syria, Hand in Hand focuses on providing food to Syrians. It is able to provide "food boxes [that] contain at least one month's supply of rice, sugar, flour bread, tinned food, cooking oil and other food items for a family of 5 people and, where required, baby milk" (“About”). Not only is it providing temporary food, Hand in Hand, with donations from donors around the world, has been able to open six hospitals filled with doctors and nurses that this organization has educated. It has trained local doctors and nurses who had lost their jobs in the war to specifically take care of other Syrians. By training local professionals, Hand in Hand for Syria is guaranteeing continuing service to Syrians who continue to seek medical attention (“About”). And while Hand in Hand is satisfying basic human needs, it is also focusing on educating the children of Syria. With donations that make this organization possible, it so far has been able to open two schools that house 250 children. Not only do these children receive an education, but they receive emotional support from team members hired by Hand in Hand. “Other organizations such as, Shelterbox, UNICEF, and the Karam foundation are all ones that are for the people who remain in Syria” (Goyette). These organizations have been successful as they can be considering they depend on the donations from people around the world. If these groups were able to revive some of the millions of dollars that other countries are putting forward to the crisis, more families could have food and water security. It is important to know that these aid groups are doing what they promise; it would also be important to involve Syrians and their opinions on how well these organizations are doing and if there is anything that they think can be done better. With the money that countries are donating along with the help of the aid groups, Syrians will not just be handed things temporarily, but will be taught new ways to live their lives until the crisis is over and for years after that. Through developmental aid Syrians can be taught to live under the circumstances they need to and to move on with their lives after the conflict. Another organization that could be implemented in Syria is called Practical Action. This group uses technology specifically to improve energy access, agriculture, and food; all of which are factors that need to be improved in Syria (“Food”). It is able to create specialized plans for the countries in need through its knowledge in science and technology. The people of Syria should work together with government and aid organizations to create a better way of living than they currently have.

These goals seem as if they can be unreachable, but history has shown us that it is a goal that can be reached. Foreign aid has been used to save countries that were faced with diminishing futures. There are

many countries that have been rebuilt by foreign aid. One example is Haiti, a country that was devastated by an earthquake in 2010. There were hundreds of organizations that were there, from short-term emergency crews to long-term organizations, that are still present in rebuilding the country. Since 2010, Haiti has received 13 billion dollars in foreign aid. The short-term emergency crews were vital for the life of Haitians, but it is the long-term organizations like the USAID that continue to rebuild Haiti. The USAID has backed a lab there that helps local farmers adjust to the changing climate (“Haiti”). They also are able to provide healthcare to 50 percent of the Haitian population (“Haiti”). Although the situation in Syria is not the same as the one in Haiti, the world should be using the foreign aid that was given to Haiti to help Syria in the same ways. As the United Nations states, it would cost 8.4 billion dollars to secure the Syrians’ urgent needs (“What”). If Syria were able to receive the foreign aid like that of Haiti, organizations would have money to put into the rebuilding of Syria. If money could be invested into organizations like Hand in Hand for Syria, Syria could change the 90 percent of people receiving food to 100 percent. And they can work together with other organizations and increase the amount of food produced within the country. There will not be any success or improvement in Syria without foreign aid being strong and heavily enforced throughout the world.

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